

Central Falls School District
Board of Trustees
Minutes
6:00 PM

November 12, 2008

I. Call to Order:

Chairwoman, Ms. Ana Cano-Morales called the Central Falls School District Board of Trustees Meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

Present were: Ms. Ana Cano-Morales, Chairwoman
 Ms. Sonia Rodrigues, Vice Chairwoman
 Ms. Mary Lou Perez (6:36 PM)
 Ms. Ana Cecilia Rosado
 Mr. Vladimir Ibarra
 Ms. Leslie Estrada (7:10 PM)

Not Present: Mr. David Cruise

II. Pledge:

Ms. Kathy Gaouette led the Board in the Pledge of Alliance.

III. Recognition:

Ms. Cano Morales acknowledged that history was made in the United States by stating the following for the record, "Since we (the Trustees) last met, this country has lived a historic moment. Regardless of what party or what political camp you are from, we all triumph from the historic implication that the election of the 44th President represents. Given the demographic and socio-economic make up of Central Falls School District, I would like to take a few moments to publicly memorialize this time by reflecting on a different time in history through the eyes and words of a great African American education leader.

America's Town Meeting of the Air, New York City - November 23, 1939

Historic figure, educator and activist Mary McLeod Bethune was called the "First Lady of the Struggle" for her influence on the Roosevelt administration on civil rights issues. In 1904, Bethune founded a small school for black girls in Florida that she quickly built into a thriving college-prep and vocational training program. In 1923, she merged the school with Cookman College to create the first fully accredited black institution of higher learning in the state.

Bethune was born to former slaves in 1875. One of seventeen children, she grew up picking cotton in Sumter County, South Carolina. Her parents owned a five-acre parcel of land, and her mother continued to work for the family that once owned her. Though her parents and siblings were illiterate, Bethune knew as a child that she wanted to escape "the dense darkness and ignorance" in which she found herself. Her ambition to read was only fueled by a white girl who once commanded her to put down a book, saying, "You can't read."

As an adult, Bethune's influence soon extended far beyond the South. She was a gifted organizer and became a leader in the effort to build coalitions among black women fighting for equal rights, better education, jobs, and political power. After leading numerous local, regional, and national women's clubs, Bethune founded a new umbrella organization in 1935, the National Council of Negro Women. Through this work Bethune became close friends with Eleanor Roosevelt, who encouraged Franklin D. Roosevelt to name Bethune director of the Office of Minority Affairs in the National Youth Administration in 1935.

At a 1939 discussion on NBC radio's weekly public affairs broadcast of "America's Town Meeting of the Air." The panelists addressed the question, What does American democracy mean to me? With her Victorian elocution and a thunderous tone, Bethune reminded her listeners that African Americans had always been willing to die for American democracy but were still shut out from its promise of freedom.

Ms. Cano Morales read part of Ms. McLeod's speech:

Democracy is for me, and for 12 million black Americans, a goal towards which our nation is marching. It is a dream and an ideal in whose ultimate realization we have a deep and abiding faith...

The democratic doors of equal opportunity have not been opened wide to Negroes. In the Deep South, Negro youth is offered only one-fifteenth of the educational opportunity of the average American child. The great masses of Negro workers are depressed and unprotected in the lowest levels of agriculture and domestic service, while the black workers in industry are barred from certain unions and generally assigned to the more laborious and poorly paid work. Their housing and living conditions are sordid and unhealthy. They live too often in terror of the lynch mob; are deprived too often of the Constitutional right of suffrage; and are humiliated too often by the denial of civil liberties. We do not believe that justice and common decency will allow these conditions to continue.

Our faith in visions of fundamental change as mutual respect and understanding between our races come in the path of spiritual awakening. Certainly there have been times when we may have delayed this mutual understanding by being slow to assume a fuller share of our national responsibility because of the denial of full equality. And yet, we have always been loyal when the ideals of American democracy have been attacked. We have given our blood in its defense—from Crispus Attucks on Boston Commons to the battlefields of France. We have fought for the democratic principles of equality under the law, equality of opportunity, equality at the ballot box, for the guarantees of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We have fought to preserve one nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Yes, we have fought for America with all her imperfections, not so much for what she is, but for what we know she can be.

Perhaps the greatest battle is before us, the fight for a new America: fearless, free, united, morally re-armed, in which 12 million Negroes, shoulder to shoulder with their fellow Americans, will strive that this nation under God will have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, for the people and by the people shall not perish from the earth. This dream, this idea, this aspiration, this is what American democracy means to me."

Source: Mary McLeod Bethune, April 6, 1949 (Carl Van Vechten Collection, Library of Congress American Memory Collection)

IV. Policy and Planning:

A. Review student work – practice session

Ms. Halzel's presentation was postponed to a later date.

B. Human Resources Code of Professional Conduct Policy – third reading

Ms. Cano-Morales acknowledged how much the policy had evolved and changed and that approval was being sought. The policy was discussed but the vote was held until after public comment.

Ms. Cano-Morales reviewed other districts' policies such as Coventry, South Kingston and Providence to make sure that Central Falls was heading in the right direction and shared her findings with the other Trustees. She also spoke of the research she conducted in regards to her own profession in social work, which also had a standard of professionalism.

Ms. Cano-Morales research was prompted by the receipt of a letter containing 278 faculty signatures, which were led by Union President Jane Sessums and her officers, opposing the policy.

Ms. Rosado asked if the signatures were for the second or for the third version of the policy.

Ms. Cano-Morales clarified that the signatures were for the second version and reiterated that the policy had changed significantly since the second reading.

Ms. Rodrigues expressed her concern over that fact that it was unclear if the faculty had a problem with the existence of the document or if the problem was with the content and how it was written. She mentioned that they had solicited and incorporated the feedback from faculty and staff. Ms. Rodrigues also stated that she was glad that people had taken the time to read, review and comment on the previous version of the document.

Ms. Cano-Morales stated that much of the feedback they received had already been incorporated and that it was important for them [the Board] to hear, but that having 278 signatures without an explanation was not sufficient cause to postpone the vote on the revised policy.

Mr. Ibarra stated that due to the feedback that was received he felt that the concern was more for certain content was in the document in the second reading, therefore he felt confident in supporting the policy.

Ms. Rosado asked if Ms. Cano-Morales had brought the other district policies only for background information or to continue so they could continue to revise the document. Ms. Cano-Morales clarified that it was only for background information.

Dr. Gallo stated that the District Strategic Plan, which they had all committed to, contained the vision and mission as well as the core values and beliefs that were used as background for this policy. She commented that the policy was intended to further professionalize the entire community and that in the letter that was signed it was clear that there was a misinterpretation in the purpose of the policy. There was no implication of disrespect intended; it was to publicly uplift the vocation of teaching and to mirror what is already happening in the district. Dr. Gallo mentioned that the revised document

was sent to all teachers, through their payroll, on October 30 with a cover letter that re-explained the positive intent of the policy.

Dr. Gallo stated for the record, “I apologize that this has come up in this manner, but it truly was a misunderstanding and a misinterpretation. I am glad we are going to wait until a little later on to actually take a vote. I feel confident and assured that this is going to be a positive vote, but I would like to see if people were still so intent on coming to express their discontent with the code of conduct, especially in light of its coming sandwiched, if you will, within the document that has a code for this Board, for us as administrators, as well as they in the teaching profession and certainly we would love to continue to work and to actually try to urge even our parent organizations to establish their own codes so that they can bring them here and even motivate the parental interest. We have a parent policy that is reviewed every year and they talk about getting involved and remaining involved in all kinds of things that we want to do.”

Ms. Rodrigues stated that in moving forward with other important policies that the Board should make sure to better communicate the intent and information in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Action: Motion to approve by Ms. Sonia Rodriguez and seconded by Ms. Anna Cecilia Rosado. Approved, 5 to 0

B. Early Dismissal Policy – Second Reading

Revisions were made to the first reading. No discussion.

Action: Motion to approve by Ms. Ana Cecilia Rosado and seconded by Ms. Mary Lou Perez. Approved, 5 to 0

C. Food Allergies Policy – First Reading

Dr. Gallo referred to the legislature change that had taken place around the “no nuts” in schools. The nurses and the Wellness Committee drafted the policy in order to give the nurse the authority, based on student and/or faculty need, to assure peanut-free zones.

Ms. Rosado had some questions on some of the wording in the policy, specifically items in numbers 6, 7 and 8 of the document and asked that the items be reworded and made clearer. The changes were discussed among the board members.

Ms. Rodrigues also asked for some clarifications on some of the specifics within the document. Dr. Gallo explained them.

Action: Reviewed and revisions suggested.

C. Budget Presentation

Director of Finance Giovanna Venditti presented the narrative information that was provided to the Board of Regents regarding the financial status for the Central Falls School District for the fiscal year 2010. She spoke about the District being level funded for several years and that the money that is scheduled to be allotted to the District would once again remain status quo. She further stated that based on the projections for the fiscal year 2010, the School District would not be able to sustain

itself based on the funding provided by the State of Rhode Island, as a result of this major cuts were made. Some of the cuts include that no contractual obligations will be made unless the Superintendent approves it, several cuts in Central Office staff; positions that have been vacated through attrition and retirement have not been replaced, out-of-district placed students have been brought back into the district and the finance office is in the process of using the state-mandated unified chart of accounts and the Unifund System. All the cuts as well as one-time sources of revenue such as the Northern Collaborative will assist the District in 2010 but leaves it in a structural deficit in fiscal year 2011.

Ms. Venditti stated that she would be giving a more detailed presentation to the board at a later date for the 2010 budget as well as a demonstration of the new Unifund software.

Dr. Gallo thanked both Ms. Venditti and the Director of Human Resources Kathy Gaouette, as well as Brad Peryea for working on the Unifund System by manually inputting the necessary information. The timeline was to go “live” by the first week of December.

Ms. Cano-Morales also thanked Ms. Venditti and reiterated that finances would be difficult for all districts because of all the substantial cuts that have been and continue to be made.

Ms. Perez stated that Board Member David Cruise had looked over the finances at one point and inquired if he was still helping the finance office review bills.

Ms. Cano-Morales acknowledged that Mr. Cruise had been doing that work and explained that she and Dr. Gallo were still doing that. She also announced that Mr. Cruise would be stepping down as a board member in January.

V. Consent Agenda:

Ms. Cano-Morales asked for a motion to approve the consent agenda.

Ms. Rosado noted that on page four of the October minutes her name was attributed to a statement that was made by Ms. Rodrigues and asked that it be corrected.

Ms. Perez made the motion to approve the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ibarra.

The consent agenda was approved, with the requested change, by the Board 5-0.

VI. Superintendent's Report:

Veterans Memorial Elementary School had its SALT visit the prior week. The visiting team presented the SALT report, which was honest and positive. The report will be posted on the RIDE site for everyone to read. The commendations and the recommendations were consistent with the district's strategic plan and things that teachers have already been commended for. One of the commendations was the acquisition of reading skills and building up of student confidence as well as their enjoyment of reading that is all part of the literacy initiative. There was a presentation of professional development from one of the district consultants in progress and two of the SALT visitors went into the classroom and joined the teachers from across the district visiting and observing the consultant doing her work in the area of writing. It came out as a recommendation that

the district pay heed to the teaching and writing in the schools. The SALT visitors were excited that they were able to also experience the professional development.

Dr. Gallo stated for the record, “I would like to commend Anne Lynch for facilitating the visit, the direction; for being really spot on in her first year there last year developing the self-study and working with the SIT team. I commend the teachers on the SIT Team. I know that Audrey Kilsey was extremely helpful in more or less planning all of the operational pieces to the event and really working very well together so I think it was a total team effort. There were recommendations and commendations for the school, for the teachers, for the district and we certainly expect to take a good look at the study and to remain committed to the strategic plan as we have developed it and the initiatives that RIDE has already strongly addressed.”

The Physical Restraint policy forms have been updated but the policy itself needed to be updated in keeping with the current law. The policy itself would be brief from the Board of Trustees perspective but the protocols and procedures that follow it would be much more detailed. The policy needs to be reviewed because there are times when physical restraint may need to be used and the teachers who perform the restraint must be trained. Dr. Gallo updated the board on some of the forms that have to be filled out and the process for submission.

Parent Teacher Conferences occurred and 40 % of the Middle School parents were present on Monday and was well received. Parents are pleased with the communications and the phone messages. Through the efforts of the Family, Community and School Partnerships Office parents are receiving a question sheet to help guide them on what questions they should be asking their child’s teacher. This effort is to help foster more of a dialogue between parents and teachers.

Ms. Perez added that she has spoken to High School Principal Mario Andrade and that he commented that the high school had a tremendous turnout of parents as well and that teachers were also reporting that the turnout was the most they had seen in years.

VII. Public Comment:

No public comment.

VIII. Next Board Meeting:

Next Board meeting will be held on December 9, 2008

IX. School Board Comment/Communication:

Ms. Cano-Morales also took a moment to commend Principal Ann Lynch of Veterans for the SALT visit. She mentioned the Learning Strides that were taking place around the district and encouraged the Trustees to participate. She also publicly affirmed that she was happy to receive the SIT Notes and to see that the content was data-driven and strategic.

Ms. Cano-Morales commented that the district was visited by Salve Regina University. The Nellie Mae Foundation and Annenberg Institute are interested in partnering with the district.

Ms. Cano-Morales announced that the 2nd Annual Education Summit would be taking place on Friday, February 6.

Ms. Rodrigues commented on the Data in Your Back Yard that was hosted by Kids Count and asked that the materials be given to those members who were unable to attend.

X. Executive Session and Adjournment of public session:

Ms. Cano-Morales asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting and go into Executive Session. Ms. Perez motioned to adjourn the meeting and Ms. Rodrigues seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 7:10 PM and moved to Executive Session.